

16 · AT THE NORTH GATE:
INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN
DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE

by Thomas Bauman

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From the very first, *The Magic Flute* has generated divergent and often contradictory traditions of interpretation. Early Austro-Germanic exegeses established several camps—the Masonic, the revolutionary, and the conservative—as Paul Nettl points out.¹ During the 1790s, Masons in northern Germany saw at once in the opera an allegory of the brotherhood's secrets. The director of the National Theater in Berlin, Johann Jakob Engel, who did not approve, intrigued to keep it off the royal stage there in 1792 despite the keen interest of the mystic and music-loving King Friedrich Wilhelm II.² Goethe, who did approve, produced the opera at Weimar, later began a sequel to it, and claimed that it took more education to praise the libretto than to condemn it.

The early decades of the nineteenth century saw the search for a key to the opera's meaning carried out in other quarters, and very often in the spirit of the contemporaneous roman à clef. In the Rhineland, which was at the time overrun with Jacobins, one writer could see a perfect cipher of the French Revolution; simultaneously, in Biedermeier Vienna, another divined a patriotic defense of the Holy Roman Empire. But no significant appeal to the music itself was made in elaborating these interpretations of the text's meaning. This holds true even for the quaint, latter-day attempt of Egon Komorzynski to foist on Schikaneder's libretto an allegory of the conflict between Italian and German opera in Vienna at the time when *The Magic Flute* was written.³

1. Paul Nettl, *Musik und Freimaurerei* (Esslingen, 1956); the essays relative to Mozart appeared in English translation as *Mozart and Masonry* (New York, 1970). Nettl builds on the work of the indefatigable Emil Karl Blümml, "Ausdeutungen der 'Zauberflöte,'" *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1 (1923): 109–46.

2. Engel declared in a letter to the king that "the public, unacquainted with certain mysteries and unable to peer through the heavy, dark veil of allegory," could not possibly take any interest in the opera; see my *North German Opera in the Age of Goethe* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 264.

3. Egon Komorzynski, *Emanuel Schikaneder: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (Vienna, 1951), pp. 215–18. The cast is interpreted as follows: Papageno (Schikaneder himself), Pamina (German opera), the Queen of the Night (Italian opera), Tamino (the German musician—Mozart), Sarastro (Joseph II), and Monostatos (who else?—Salieri!).

Recent insights into the opera's possible meanings differ sharply from the early Austro-Germanic *Deutungen*. They come mostly from non-German writers, for one thing, and they prefer the psychological and philosophical to the social-political. In 1959, the British art historian Michael Levey offered a new view of Pamina, at least partly in response to the apparent misogyny in the opera and in much of the literature touching on her. "Not only is Pamina very different from . . . the rest of Mozart's female characters," he writes, "but she is a novel conception in operatic history and perhaps in eighteenth-century literature." She appears first as a normal operatic heroine, a passive creature destined as a prize for Tamino's heroics. But she sheds this role, inspired not by Tamino but by a more abstract, almost Platonic ideal of love as the agency of personal growth. Her fate, Levey remarks of her suicide scene, "far outweighs our interest in that of Tamino. From this point onwards Tamino ceases explicitly to be a character in his own right; his fate is merged with Pamina's."⁴

The idea of merged fates (later amplified to merged personalities, as we shall see shortly) figured little if at all in the Masonic study of Jacques Chailley a decade later.⁵ His attempt to apply Masonic symbolism to every detail of the opera's structure led him to lay heavy stress on the antagonistic duality represented by the Queen of the Night and Sarastro, under which Tamino and Pamina are to be comprehended. Chailley even suggested that the duality's embodiment in the opera had more than a little to do with the antipathy of Vienna's male lodges toward their female counterpart, the so-called lodges of adoption.

Joscelyn Godwin took a broader view in a provocative article published in 1979, "Layers of Meaning in *The Magic Flute*." Godwin reads into the opera's story a historical allegory of esoteric organizations in general. Although he begins like earlier exegetes with an attempt to read *The Magic Flute* as historical allegory, he interprets the opera's possible relationship to esoteric cults from an inner, psychological perspective. Specifically, he applies the Jungian concept of the *animus* and the *anima* to Tamino and Pamina. From Tamino's standpoint, Pamina represents his soul or *anima*, in Jungian terms his own inward feminine qualities, lacking in his masculine conscious attitude. At the beginning of his spiritual journey, Tamino simply projects his *anima* onto Pamina (in the opera, we may recall, he falls in love not with Pamina herself but with her portrait). "Pamina's relationship with Tamino," Godwin states, "cannot be described by a simple reversal of terms," since her inward qualities are also feminine.⁶ The *animus* she projects onto Tamino in-

4. Michael Levey, "Aspects of Mozart's Heroines," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22 (1959): 132-56; the section on Pamina comprises pp. 132-43, with quotes here from pp. 133 and 140. For a particularly absurd specimen of male chauvinism on the subject of Pamina and Tamino, see Alfred Heuss, "Liebt—auf Grund der 'Zauberflöte'—die Frau oder der Mann tiefer und stärker?" *Zeitschrift für Musik* 92 (1925): 72-79.

5. Jacques Chailley, "The Magic Flute": *Masonic Opera*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York, 1972); originally published as "La flûte enchantée," *Opéra maçonnique* (Paris, 1968).

6. Joscelyn Godwin, "Layers of Meaning in *The Magic Flute*," *Musical Quarterly* 65 (1979): 471-92; quote p. 487.

vests her consciousness with a capacity for reflection and self-knowledge. In this interpretation, then, the opera's central love interest is seen principally in terms of relatedness, incompleteness, and interchange.

Following similar lines, Dorothy Koenigsberger has suggested "that all the main characters of *The Magic Flute* are also joint participants in one being, one psyche, or one soul," the major theme played out through this metaphor being "the human quest for self-perfection."⁷ Leaning heavily on alchemical lore, she describes a rite of purification that takes place in stages within Sarastro's temple, which itself stands as the body of the one being.

Early interpretations had assumed that *The Magic Flute* lay under a cipher, and that the key to this cipher, once it was found, would unlock a single, unified meaning. Implicitly, they seem to share many of the assumptions underlying E. D. Hirsch's epistemological conception of valid interpretation as the explication of a verbal meaning that is reproducible, stable over time, and intended by the author (or in this case, authors).⁸ Recent writers, in contrast (with the notable exception of Chailley), speak less of a single, determinate meaning and more of complexes or "layers" of meaning. Neither do they shrink from retrojecting Freudian and Jungian modes of thought onto the work. All this Hans-Georg Gadamer would probably find both heartwarming and deliciously ironic—heartwarming in that the work's critical *Rezeptionsgeschichte* appears as *Wirkungsgeschichte*, that is, as a series of mediated, co-determined meanings erected largely on earlier interpretations and contemporary prejudices; ironic in that *The Magic Flute* itself, as a child of the Enlightenment, came into being in an age that proclaimed open warfare on the prejudices Gadamer considers an indispensable condition of true understanding.⁹

It is significant, though not uncharacteristic, that the recent studies discussed above do not have much to say about the music of the opera.¹⁰ Indeed, it is most curious. After all, *The Magic Flute* has flourished and fascinated because of the genius of Mozart's music, not the mythic power of Schikaneder's cobbled text. Whether one agrees or not with Gadamer that we cannot escape our own prejudices in the hermeneutic act of understanding, in the case of *The Magic Flute* the least we can do is test our interpretations against the part of the work that really counts.

What follows is a preliminary attempt at incorporating at least one portion of Mozart's music into recent interpretations of *The Magic Flute*, and in particular into ideas about Pamina and Tamino as co-equal, merged personalities. The role of

7. Dorothy Koenigsberger, "A New Metaphor for Mozart's *Magic Flute*," *European Studies Review* 5 (1975): 229–75; quote p. 231.

8. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn., 1967); see esp. chap. 2.

9. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 4th ed. (Tübingen, 1975), 2.2.1; translated from the 2d edition as *Truth and Method* (London, 1975) by Garrett Barden and John Cumming.

10. Chailley offers a number-by-number analysis, but one single-mindedly limited to possible Masonic symbolism in the score.

instrumental utterance seems a propitious point of focus: it operates on all levels, from the slightest inflection within a number, to the opera's imposing overture; it also opens up a position outside the work's immediate verbal meanings, a new and essentially musical vantage point from which to assess the aesthetic relevance of those meanings—all of which seems useful in confronting an opera where appearance and reality are so clearly at issue.

As Mozart himself did, we shall leave the overture for last, and turn first to the role of the closing ritornello in *The Magic Flute*. Normally, this device acts as a convention, as a musical signal that a number has ended. When it serves in this way, nothing more than a perfunctory cadence or two is needed, or perhaps a repetition of the closing bars of the sung portion. To be sure, Mozart made use of these well-worn procedures here and there in *The Magic Flute*; but at other times in the opera he transforms this potentially mechanical routine into something much more artful.

Edward Cone, in his book *The Composer's Voice*, analyzes the interacting roles that voice and accompaniment play in solo vocal music, using the German Lied as his field of study.¹¹ The sophisticated relationship he describes derives ultimately from Mozart, and not from his Lieder but from his operas and concert arias. Here, the independence of the orchestral part was a primary reason early listeners tended to find Mozart's style overwrought and confusing. In his operas, the technique was little short of revolutionary, for it established a distinctive and wholly music-dramatic "persona" (to use Cone's word), a voice separate from the character's. Mozart's closing ritornellos in effect transfer responsibility for creating a sense of an ending from the text and its singer to this other voice. And the ritornello's last thoughts are almost always conceived in the spirit not of the number's autonomous musical workings, but of the dramatic situation in which it is fixed.

For a simple example, look at the end of Tamino's famous picture aria, "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön" (Ex. 16.1). By the normal standards of tonal-motivic analysis, this is run-of-the-mill work: the pitches are not particularly distinctive, nor are the harmonies they arpeggiate. But rhythmic and dynamic features are a different matter. Tamino has just sung five variations on "Und ewig wäre sie dann mein" ("And then would she be mine forever"). The underlying rhythm of these variations—an upbeat to a dotted eighth followed by three sixteenths—shapes the ritornello's cadence figure. With Tamino's fivefold closing utterance fresh in our ears, we hear his words as the "inner text" of the ritornello, as indicated above the

11. Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974), esp. chap. 1 on Schubert's setting of Goethe's "Erlkönig."

EXAMPLE 16.1. *Zauberflöte*, No. 3

61

Hms. *f* *p*

(und e - wig wär' und e - wig wä - re)

Str. *f* *p*

TAMINO

mein. *f* *p*

Bsns. *f* *p*

first violins in Ex. 16.1. Notice as well that the ritornello's pattern is stated first forte, then piano. The forte statement flushes with Tamino's joyous anticipation, but the piano one that follows offers a pensive afterthought that seems to hang hesitantly on the subjunctive *wäre*.

With these few strokes we have Tamino's whole character before us—not just the knight ready to dash off, half cocked, to rescue a damsel in distress, but a mind also given to reflection. (This is Mozart's creation, incidentally, for there is little if any depth to the hero as presented by Schikaneder.) Other closing ritornellos in act 1 tend toward similar expository goals with respect to characterization. In act 2, however, their function changes. Consider Sarastro's aria with the chorus of priests, "O Isis und Osiris." The closing ritornello (Ex. 16.2A) again suggests an "inner text" by echoing the closing bars sung by the chorus of priests, who themselves are echoing Sarastro's concluding prayer, "Nehmt sie in euren Wohnsitz auf" ("Take them into your dwelling-place"). But again Mozart has worked a subtle change: the ritornello takes up harmonies of the chorus's concluding statement but modifies the melodic cadence along the lines of one heard earlier, in the act 1 duet "Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen" (Ex. 16.2B). We are now much further along in the opera, caught in an ever richer tapestry of associations; the linkage provided here by the orchestra's closing bars is no longer just to the immediate situation, but to a vital strand even deeper in the opera's fabric. In the immediate context of the aria, the ritornello speaks of the union of Tamino and his companion Papageno

EXAMPLE 16.2A-B.

A: Zauberflöte, No. 10

B: Zauberflöte, No. 7

A

Bsn. I, Tbn. tenore

49

Bsn. II

(Nehmt sie in eu - ren Wohn - sitz auf.)

Vla. I, Bst. hrn. I,
Tbn. alto

Vla. II, Bst. hrn. II

TEN. I, II

p

Nehmt sie in eu - ren Wohn-sitz auf.

p BASS I, II

Tbn. basso

Vcl.

B

28 Vlns.

Vla.

PAMINA

nichts Ed - lers sei, als Weib und Mann,

PAPAGENO

nichts Ed - lers sei, als Weib und Mann,

Bassi

with the gods should the trials end with their death; but we also hear in a broader context an appeal to the duet's aphoristic dictum, "Nichts edlers sei als Weib und Mann" ("Nothing is nobler than wife and husband"). It is not to the present, physical pair of Tamino and Papageno that the ritornello directs our attention, but to the ideal pair, Tamino and Pamina.

To think not of immediate appearances but of larger significance is the principal lesson both Tamino and Pamina must learn in the opera. And Mozart's music asks us to think in similar terms about the meaning of seemingly slight details when taken in a larger context. It is a long-recognized part of the opera's individual style that its score is strewn with musical interconnections of all kinds. Rather than worrying these interconnections into a single arcane reading, however, we should acknowledge the invitation they extend to multilayered interpretation—the same sort of interpretation the libretto has received in recent years.

Nowhere is the interplay of detail and larger context richer than in the four measures that close Pamina's g-minor aria in act 2. Bending to the strictures of his trials, Tamino has refused to speak to Pamina and, with a sigh, has motioned her away. The aria embodies her response, cast as a classical lament, in the minor mode and with a predominance of descending conjunct motion and affective chromatic inflections.

The closing orchestral ritornello, of surpassing expressive eloquence, differs from all other ritornellos in the opera, analogous to the way in which the sublime is distinguished from the beautiful. We have reached the crux of the opera's fundamental human relationship—a moment of deepest despair for Pamina, who sings, and for Tamino, who is bound to silence. As classical rhetoric had taught since the days of Longinus, and as Burke and Kant had stressed in the eighteenth century, the sublime defies conventional expectations. In various ways, earlier ritornellos had established what those expectations are. One thing they all share is reliance on a close *rhythmic* association with a key phrase in the foregoing number. Pamina's aria, however, appears to offer no such connection. Quite the opposite, in fact. After a breathless moment of silence, the ritornello abruptly abandons the aria's 6/8 heartbeat pattern for an entirely new one of far greater metric complexity (Ex. 16.3). The new pattern begins on the weak beat of m. 38 and continues out of metric joint until disrupted by a compression of activity at the Neapolitan in the middle of m. 40.

As so often happens in *The Magic Flute*, silence is used as expressively as the notes themselves. Silence is one of the virtues the Three Youths urge on Tamino, and a virtue that Mozart detected with pleasure in the opera's first audiences. After writing to Constanze of the most applauded numbers at an early performance, he added: "But what pleases me the most is the *silent applause*: one can see how much

EXAMPLE 16.3. *Zauberflöte*, No. 17

38

Fl. *cresc.* Ob. *f* *p*

(Sieh Ta-mi-no Ta-mi-no Ta-mi-no Ta-mi-no...)

Str. *p* *cresc.* Bsn. *f* *p* Bassi *f* *p*

i VI iv III i VI \flat II $\frac{6}{6}$ V $\frac{6-5}{4-3}$ i

this opera continues to grow.”¹² Silence is a crucial ingredient in the opera—dramatically and musically. An important function of the silence following Pamina’s last cadence is to distance the ritornello from its potential role as a simple echo of the aria’s closing thought and enjoin deeper reflection on the moment. Further, it helps erase any lingering sense of metric continuity, so that the singular metric-rhythmic features of the ritornello strike us more forcefully.

Yet beneath all of this distancing, the closing ritornello is deeply indebted to the aria it concludes. The opening two measures trace the same descending octave outlined by Pamina’s first words, “Ach, ich fühl’s, es ist verschwunden” (Ex. 16.4). More important, the melodic motif employed here is a direct elaboration of her interjection “Sieh, Tamino!” from the passionate middle section of the aria. Harmonically, the ritornello falls by thirds through the descending D-to-D octave, I–VI–iv, as shown in Ex. 16.3. When the flutes, bassoons, and oboes enter, the dynamic level increases to forte, and a new set of falling thirds begins on B-flat, III–i–VI. At the end of this second set of thirds (on the fourth eighth-beat of m. 40), several things happen to break the ritornello’s pattern. A second octave descent from D that began at the end of m. 39 breaks off; the dynamics shift back to piano; and the displaced metric pattern slips abruptly back into the regular 6/8 meter of the aria. Then, in place of the expected subdominant, a Neapolitan sixth

12. “— was mir aber am meisten freuet, ist, der *Stille beifall!* — man sieht recht wie sehr und immer mehr diese Oper steigt”; letter of 7–8 October 1791.

EXAMPLE 16.4. *Zauberflöte*, No. 17

1 PAMINA

Ach ich fühl's, es ist ver-schwun-den!

39 *p* *cresc.* *f* *p*

17 Sieh Ta-mi-no

chord produces sudden harmonic darkness at this moment of metric compression. Under this dark shadow, the “Tamino” motif disintegrates into the final linear descent to the tonic.

For whom does the orchestra speak in these moving final measures? The obvious answer would be Pamina. As in earlier ritornellos, this passage derives a psychological subtext from key verbal phrases in her aria. In this case, however, the process is far more thoroughgoing. Tamino’s name seems to repeat itself obsessively in Pamina’s mind, and through the octave descent (see Ex. 16.4) his name is linked with her aria’s opening thoughts of lost happiness.

Or does the “inner text” sound instead in Tamino’s mind? The moment of silence that separates this passage from the aria proper offers a stark manifestation of the excruciating vow of silence under which he suffers, and the cry that echoes in the ritornello—“Sieh, Tamino”—was after all addressed to him. There is a certain exquisite uncertainty about whether he, she, or both are laying claim to our sympathies in the aria’s closing ritornello. We have seen how the lovers have been viewed in modern literary interpretations of *The Magic Flute* as merged entities, as joint participants in a single soul. Both come to understand some such higher reality in the course of the opera, and it is this reality that we can begin to hear in these despairing final measures. In a clear departure from convention, Pamina and Tamino never sing a love duet anywhere; rather, each acts as a silent partner in the single aria granted to the other by Mozart and Schikaneder. In his aria, Tamino accepted appearance for reality—Pamina’s mute picture for herself—just as he soon

after accepts the Queen's interpretation of events for the events themselves. Here in Pamina's aria, she too accepts appearance for reality—Tamino's silence and apparent indifference for a lack of love. In both arias the same key phrase covers the deception: "ich fühl's," Tamino had sung on gazing at her portrait; "Ach, ich fühl's," Pamina sings when greeted by his silence.

This silence torments both equally. Each is fighting the same battle for self-mastery, and each battle hangs in the balance at Pamina's last, despairing allusion to death, followed by a breathless moment of silence. In the closing ritornello Pamina's anguish becomes Tamino's own as he hears his name die with her last hopes in the final orchestral strains. The forte eruption in mm. 39 and 40 cries out briefly in protest, then resigns to the downward pull of the dark Neapolitan cadence. It is not hard to imagine the stage gestures that might accompany this music. As in the closing ritornello of Tamino's aria, where piano similarly follows forte (as illustrated above in Ex. 16.1), reflection now succeeds fervor, thought masters feeling.

The closing orchestral rumination is more than a last thought in this case: it is an afterthought, for Mozart's autograph indicates that he added these measures after completing both the outer voices and the filling-in of the aria proper. Perhaps he appended it out of frankly dramaturgical concern; Pamina must make a slow, disconsolate exit after she finishes singing, and without these final bars, applause from the audience might work utter ruin on this supreme moment. Here, if ever, the opera demands the "silent applause" of its audiences.

It is generally agreed that *Don Giovanni* is Mozart's greatest operatic achievement, indeed to most minds the "opera of all operas." But critical opinion has not extended an analogous honor to its overture. Among Mozart's mature operas, Nissen pointed instead to the overture to *The Magic Flute* as Mozart's greatest instrumental prologue and, more than that, as the "Ouverture aller Ouverturen."¹³ Possibly a form of reverence for last utterances guided Nissen's choice. Written down on the eve of the inaugural performance of *The Magic Flute* in September 1791, the overture, together with the march of the priests from act 2, represents Mozart's farewell to the musical stage.

In writing out the overture last, Mozart was continuing a practice followed in all the other operas he composed after *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. German scholars in particular have sought to fashion from this fact a view of the Mozartian opera overture as the summary that is greater than its parts, as a distillation of the work's deepest meaning unfettered by dependent ties to word or action on the

13. Nissen, *Biographie W. A. Mozarts*, Anhang, p. 117.

stage. This view has a long history in German Romantic thought. In the early nineteenth century, the poet Wackenroder went so far as to propose that the overture to a theatrical work be played last, where the music's sublime accents could idealize the work's spiritual message after its imperfect visual-verbal rendering by the actors.¹⁴

A similar idealistic tone continues to suffuse modern musical discussions of the overture to *The Magic Flute*. For Hermann Abert—to take the most magisterial example—the counterpoint of the overture's Allegro symbolizes “the highest idea of the piece, the triumph of complete and noble humanity over the resistance of all antagonistic powers.” And, lest this be taken too literally, he adds: “The overture betrays nothing at all of the following dramatic conflict itself.” Instead, as the last piece of the opera written by Mozart, it is to be regarded as “a sort of lyric general confession of Mozart's on his whole inner relationship to his work. For one last time the artistic experience of the opera stormed through his soul; now, however, it is no longer *Die Zauberflöte* in its concrete form but *Zauberflötenstimmung* that inspires him to this piece.”¹⁵

Abert was unable or unwilling to hear the overture's abstract musical argument in terms of the drama that so deeply informs the close of Pamina's aria. Do we need a dramatic context beyond the movement itself in order to interpret its meaning? The music does not seem to cry out for such a context, at least compared with many works from the century that followed. In fact, the overture to *The Magic Flute* is universally acknowledged to be a masterpiece of formal design, with a degree of coherence and unity unusual even by Mozartian standards.

The question, then, is not whether we *need* a dramatic context, but how we interpret the fact that we have one. Indeed, how do we reconcile the overture's formal perfection with the opera it introduces? To my knowledge, no one has ever called the story of *The Magic Flute* a masterpiece of design. Quite the contrary—the libretto has been generally regarded, in Dent's words, as “one of the most absurd specimens of that form of literature in which absurdity is regarded as a matter of course.” Does the overture stand apart or, better, above all this? We know that throughout Mozart's creative life, his operatic overtures became more and more intimately related to the drama that each introduces. Yet why has it proved so difficult to draw more than the most general associations of mood (Abert's *Zauberflötenstimmung*) between the overture to *The Magic Flute* and the opera's rich store of symbolic meanings?

One way to go about answering this question is to consider the proposition that compelling formal coherence does not preclude a metaformal dimension to the overture's musical argument—indeed, that we experience this dimension precisely

14. Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*, ed. Ludwig Tieck (Hamburg, 1799); quoted from Wackenroder's *Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg, 1967), p. 257.

15. Abert, *W. A. Mozart* 2: 635.

in and through such coherence. The metaformal dimension distinguishes itself from the formal by thematizing phenomena and processes that contribute to formal clarity: the hierarchy of levels on which several of the overture's basic features can be perceived, for example, or the technique of interruption or delay. Formal analysis explains how the overture's argument is carried on in such musical terms; metaformal analysis explains how the argument is also *about* those terms and, on that basis, what analogies we might fruitfully and responsibly draw to the essential characteristics and processes we have isolated. We shall return to this problem after looking at some of these characteristics and processes.

When the principal theme bolts from the closing cadence of the overture's Adagio, the world of fugue with all its associations seems to rush in with it. Like every good fugue subject, this one was no doubt crafted with much care. In this respect its oft-cited resemblance to the main theme of a sonata written a decade earlier by Muzio Clementi can only be regarded as unfortunate, for it has branded the subject as little more than humble raw material, a stock in trade (Ex. 16.5A–B).

It is hard to make much out of Clementi's theme; Mozart's, in contrast, rouses the listener from comfortable habits immediately with its incessant sforzandi on the weak fourth beat of every measure. Abert shunted these crucial dynamic markings aside in phrasing the subject across each bar (Ex. 16.6). We must disagree. How can a sforzando *gruppetto* ending in a leading tone to tonic possibly be considered an upbeat to a piano dominant in the next measure? On the contrary, Mozart seems to have introduced the sforzando precisely to insulate the two pitches from each other, the tonic torqued into place with a conclusive blur of sixteenth notes at the end of the first measure, the dominant at the end of the next. These two primal degrees sound at the beginning of the subject as two distinct tonal poles.

In the third measure of the subject a pair of rising fourths carries forward the repeated-note pattern and weak-beat accentuation of the first two measures. Mozart reiterates this G–C–F–B \flat pattern in the fourth measure, as well he might. Its circle-of-fifths trajectory and linear longing for descent to the tonic broach major issues for the rest of the overture. For the present, this longing does not find fulfillment: other fugue subjects with which this one has been compared (shown in Ex. 16.7A–B) complete the expected sequential descent to the tonic. The subject of the overture to *The Magic Flute* does not.

After this initial statement in the second violins, the first violins reply with a tonal answer. Meanwhile, the seconds add to the metric conflict already brewing with a suspension figure that injects a new sforzando, this one on the second beat (Ex. 16.8). With the third entry, the subject drops to a lower register and aural attention shifts to an important counterpoint based on the descending scale that we shall for convenience call the countersubject.

EXAMPLE 16.5A-B.

A: *Zauberflöte*, Overture

B: Clementi: Piano Sonata in B-flat, Op. 41, No. 2

A

B

EXAMPLE 16.6. *Zauberflöte*, Overture, after Abert

EXAMPLE 16.7A-B.

A: Bach, *Das wohltempierte Klavier*, Book 2, Fugue 7

B: Mozart, Fantasy and Fugue in C, K. 394

A

B

To this point we have heard the subject in the tonic, then a tonal answer, then the subject once again in the tonic. With the entry of the fourth voice, however, Mozart quite exceptionally writes a *real* answer (Ex. 16.9). Why? In the four-voiced fugues with tonal answers in the *Well-tempered Clavier*, Bach never once resorted to such a pattern. If he did not choose to make the fourth entry a tonal answer, he opted instead for a restatement of the subject in the tonic. In the overture to *The*

EXAMPLE 16.8. *Zauberflöte*, Overture

22 V. I. *p* *f* *p* *f* *fp* *fp*

V. II *fp* *fp* *f* *p* *f*

26 *p* "countersubject" *fp* *tr*

Vcl., Vla., Bsn. *p* *sf* *p* *sf* *p* *f*

30 *fp* *tr*

p *f* *p*

EXAMPLE 16.9. *Zauberflöte*, Overture

33 V. I. *tr* *tr*

V. II *sfp* *fp*

Vla. *p* *sf* *p* *sf* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Bassi, Bsn. *p* *sf* *p* *sf* *p* *f* *p* *f*

EXAMPLE 16.10. *Zauberflöte*, Overture

(Strings only)

39 V. I. *unis.*
 V. II. *f*
 Bassi, *f* *sf*
 Vla. *f* *sf*
 Vla. *all'ott.*

Magic Flute, however, both the slow introduction and the fugue subject itself force the issue of tonic-dominant polarity, and like other musical details throughout the opera, this polarity is projected onto an ever-broadening scale as the piece unfolds.

The very nature of a normative fugal exposition of course insures a higher-level expression of the stratification of I and V already embodied in the Allegro's subject. On an even larger plane, so does sonata form. But at this point, how do we know that what we are hearing *is* a sonata form? It is precisely Mozart's setting of the fourth entry as a real answer that first alerts us to the fact that not fugue but a higher level of harmonic polarity, that of eighteenth-century sonata form, will govern the overture's overall architecture. Mozart's real answer in the dominant sets up one of the trustiest patterns for anchoring the tonic in an Exposition's primary group—a dominant prolongation issuing in an assertive, forte restatement of the main theme. Six measures of dominant introduced by the fourth entry's real answer prepare for the return of both subject and countersubject at m. 39. But this restatement of the themes is not literal. The subject has shed its third and fourth bars—the ones with the anxious rising fourths—as well as its weak-beat sforzandi; this confident, triadic, metrically stable new version of the subject is now wedded to the countersubject at the octave in invertible counterpoint (Ex. 16.10).

How might these events, so beautifully integrated in their own right, be related to the opera that follows? The fugue subject, which grows into the vigorous, self-assured entity we just heard, first appeared in a different guise, disjunct, buffeted back and forth, and harried by weak-beat accents. The countersubject added several things lacking in the original manifestation of the subject: clear downbeats and purposive descending conjunct motion down to the tonic. The interaction of these musical ideas is tantamount to that of two complementary personalities. Let us resist the temptation to construe them as stand-ins for Tamino and Pamina (a blatant example of what Ludwig Finscher has called "vulgar hermeneutics")¹⁶ and

16. Ludwig Finscher, "Zwischen absoluter und Programmusik": Zur Interpretation der deutschen romantischen Symphonie," in *Über Symphonien: Beiträge zu einer musikalischen Gattung* (Tutzing, 1979), p. 108. Finscher distinguishes the "Vulgarhermeneutik der Konzertführer" from his own interpretive concept of "transmusikalische Inhalt." But "transmusical content" must equally be distinguished from the metaformal, but still essentially musical, dimension we have spoken of here.

instead consider the subject and countersubject in their own right as an ideal *musical* couple, having analogies to the world of the opera, but of a metaphorical rather than allegorical nature.

It appears that at one time Mozart thought of connecting the overture's principal theme directly with Tamino. He had originally planned a different overture for the opera, which he later rejected (K. Anh. 102; see Ex. 15.3 above); its theme shows unmistakable affinities with Tamino's picture aria and virtually none with the final overture as we know it. The autograph of this passage has disappeared from the Mozarteum in Salzburg, but its continuation is preserved on an autograph leaf at Berlin. The paper on which it is written was not used by Mozart before he had returned from Prague in September of 1791.¹⁷ Until quite late in the compositional process, then, he appears to have had a very different plan for the overture in mind, one involving a direct link to Tamino and the central love interest.

Such a connection was by no means unprecedented. In his earlier German opera, *The Abduction*, Mozart had linked the overture to the opera's hero in no uncertain terms, quoting Belmonte's opening arietta in the minor mode as the central section of the opera's overture. Why did he not pursue his initial idea of linking the overture to *The Magic Flute* with Tamino? Can it possibly be that Mozart opted in the end for what Abert perceived—an overture that “betrays nothing at all of the following dramatic conflict itself”?

We might notice that these musical personalities are not presented to us as separate entities—as, say, the contrasting themes of the Exposition's two key areas—but in almost continuous counterpoint with each other. Godwin's application of the Jungian *anima* and *animus* and Levey's efforts to promote the significance of Pamina and her trials as at the very least commensurate with Tamino's seem analogous here to the musical principles underlying the overture's thematics. Perhaps in abandoning his earlier idea for the overture and its obvious affinities with Tamino's aria, Mozart was looking beyond the male protagonist to a deeper level, to a musical narrative of contrapuntally conjoined personalities who are developed and reshaped by their common experiences.

The Magic Flute wears its didactic heart on its sleeve. It is not a love story but rather a parable about love and its role in the human quest for self-betterment. One of the opera's key musical numbers states its motto: “Mann und Weib und Weib und Mann / reichen an die Gottheit an” (“Husband and wife, and wife and husband, reach toward the divine”). The interchange of nouns is not to be overlooked. It is linguistic testimony to the reciprocal relationship of the ideal pair. The aphorism, we may notice, is not uttered for the sake of the couple who sing it—Pamina and Papageno—for they come from different spheres and pursue different paths. It celebrates instead the principle of growth in mutuality, the same principle that underlies the opera's overture.

17. Tyson, *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores*, p. 341n23.

EXAMPLE 16.11. *Zauberflöte*, Overture

58 Fl. I

p

V. I

V. II *p*

Vla. *p*

62

Ob. I *p*

Bassi *p*

In the opera this principle is tested through the instrument of trials. Virtually every model of personal growth from Freemasonry to Freud acknowledges the need for impediments which, once overcome, lead to a higher plane of consciousness or fulfillment. In the overture, the first hint of any obstacle comes at the end of the transition section. Normally Mozart allowed for a rhetorical pause on V of V here, followed by the second group. Instead he has interpolated a six-bar sequence (Ex. 16.11). While these six measures could conceivably have been omitted with no lapse in musical logic, without them the secondary theme would lose a significant degree of musical meaning. For this six-bar sequence interjects a tentative, quizzical dialogue between the two principal motives. The subject has lost its anxious sforzandi and has gained a sense of direction: it is now clearly phrased across the bar. The countersubject undergoes a contrary transformation, now inverted and chromatic instead of descending and diatonic.

Owing to the interpolated sequence, the dominant comes into focus only by degrees. And these degrees have a familiar ring. The harmonic motion of the sequence brings back the pitch relations of the subject's restless third and fourth bars: G to C, F to B-flat, followed by a IV–V–I cadence in the new key. We noticed earlier how the subject had shed these fourths when wedded to the countersubject

at the octave. Yet although these two bars of rising fourths never appear again as part of the subject, they do not disappear from the overture. Rather, they take on an antagonistic role as the harmonic underpinning of progressively broader and darker sequential passages, beginning with this six-bar interpolation.

Another kind of interpolation, more admonitory in character than these six bars, occurs after the double bar with the ceremonial intonation of the Threefold Chord. This represents the one direct quotation of musical material from the opera itself. The Threefold Chord—three groups of three forte bursts of a B-flat-major triad scored for winds and brass—was a last-minute addition to the opera, written down on a separate leaf and inserted into the score near the beginning of act 2, where it announces the start of the trials. It occupies the same position and the same key in the overture, where it performs an analogous function with respect to the subject and countersubject. Their trials begin in earnest with the Development. It is organized thematically and harmonically as shown in Table 9.

Mozart normally favored an unsegmented plan for his Development sections. Here, however, he divided it with a measure-long rhetorical pause in m. 127 that cuts short an anticipated cadence in g minor. Like a parabola, this dark Development, cast almost entirely in the minor mode, moves from b-flat minor to g minor, then back again to B-flat major. The rhetorical pause acts as the vertex of the parabola: it is approached through a broad forte sequence that carries an intense canon through the entire gamut of g minor, a canon in which the subject struggles against itself.

At the beginning of the canon we again encounter the pitch collection of the main theme's rising fourths (g-c-F-B^b). Already directly implicated in moments of anxiety and obstruction in the overture, it returns here at the movement's darkest moment. The canon's circle back to g minor is forestalled at the vertex of our metaphorical parabola by the bar of silence. Among the overture's many interruptions, this is the profoundest of them all. As we saw earlier, silence stands at the midpoint of the trials of Tamino and Pamina, as the ultimate test of the bonds uniting them. Here too in the overture's drama, silence is made to represent its point of furthest remove, both harmonically and expressively.

The second half of the Development reacts to the silence with another circle of fifths. The most troubled forms of the principal motifs appear in this half of the Development. The subject redoubles its off-beat sforzandi in a pungent diminished-octave cross-relation; the countersubject, now disconnected from the subject, seems to lose its bearings as it wanders up and down, looking for a way out of each successive dominant seventh. This sixteen-bar passage following the bar of silence invokes for the last time the same four pitches that began the canon, G-C-F-B^b, now on the grandest scale of all.

By progressive expansion this small motivic feature from the subject has been projected onto ever larger fields. And by extension, the anxiety and lack of fulfill-

TABLE 9.
Thematic-harmonic Scheme
of the Development, Overture to *The Magic Flute*

S + CS	S + gruppetto in augmentation	S + CS			S in canon at the octave								
103	105	109				117							
<u> </u>		<u> </u>		<u> </u>			<u> </u>						
b ^b				c	E ^b	g	<u>g c F B^b E^b a^o D c g D</u>						
variants and C and S in fourfold sequence												(Recapitulation)	
127	128										144		
<u> </u>		<u> </u>										<u> </u>	
G.P.	V/vi	V/ii	V/v	V/i	I								
	(G)	(C)	(F)	(B ^b)	(E ^b)								
	<u> </u>												

ment these fourths represented in the subject have expanded to large-scale instability. Now, however, the inability of these fourths to descend to E-flat is at last overcome. It is, in the end, the recovery of the countersubject's diatonic bearings and its descent along the tonic major scale that leads to the quiet victory of the Recapitulation.

Although the tortuous path followed by the Development section might seem to suggest labyrinthine disorder, it is actually among the most carefully planned in all of Mozart's works, hence the geometric metaphor of the parabola. The symmetry, as shown in Table 10, extends beyond the plunge deep to the flat side, the rise to the canon and pause in g minor, and the return to the threshold of c-flat minor. There is also the aural pattern created by the insistent repeated notes of the subject's first bars. In the first half of the Development, the subject moves through

TABLE 10.
Key Scheme of the Development,
Overture to *The Magic Flute*

Bar:	103	109	117	127	128	132	136	140
Flats: 2	(B \flat)		g (canon)	PAUSE				
3		c			V $_7$ /c			(E \flat)
4						V $_7$ /f		
5	b \flat					V $_7$ /b \flat		
6							V $_7$ /c \flat	
Reciting note								
of subject:	B \flat -F	C-G			G	C	F	B \flat

a retrograde of the four-note pitch collection G–C–F–B \flat , and then in the second half through the same collection in their proper order. The modal shift from B-flat major to b-flat minor at the start is similarly mirrored by a leap from an expected e-flat minor to E-flat major at the end of the Development.

Symmetrical planning around a central focus in music, because it unfolds in time to the ear rather than appearing, as here, synoptically to the eye, is dynamic rather than static, Euripidean rather than Euclidian. An especially powerful example in late Mozart appears toward the close of *La clemenza di Tito* with Vitellia's recitative and rondo (Table 11). The recitative, "Ecco il punto, o Vitellia," is a profound self-examination that begins in D, then moves through a series of questions about her conduct leveled by Vitellia at herself, falling remorselessly to ever darker tonal regions, until at b-flat minor she realizes the futility of her position: "Ah! mi vedrei sempre Sesto d'intorno" ("Ah! I would find myself always near Sesto").

The pattern thus begun informs every subsequent element under its curve. Vitellia pauses on the climb from b-flat at F major for her great rondo, "Non più di fiori," the basset horn weaving poignant garlands as she sings of wedding hopes now vanished, and even the Allegro beginning with a dark turn to f minor and A-flat major. But most astonishing in its power and grandeur is the arrival of the G-major chorus "Che del ciel, che degli Dei," the greatest compliment ever paid to the aspirations of Metastasian opera to idealize the worth and dignity of those who hold temporal power. Poised at the end of this broad tonal trajectory, the chorus and the sovereign it celebrates assume a far-reaching scope of vision that extends back over the preceding darkness, as if the whole course of Vitellia's agonized self-searching lay already within Tito's ken—a benign omniscience that in *The Magic Flute* is invested in Sarastro.

Less directly, one feels something of the same omniscience in the overtures to both operas. Each is a masterpiece of instrumental design and expression yet at the same time deeply implicated in the central conflicts of the opera it introduces. Chapter 18 discusses how intimately the overture to *La clemenza di Tito* is related to the music of the entire opera. *The Magic Flute*, in contrast, makes a different claim of kinship. As befits the character of the opera itself, the affinities appear deeper and more mysterious.

Walter Wiora, in his classic essay "Between Absolute and Program Music," has observed that "an opera overture partakes of the basic mood, the atmosphere, the overall qualities . . . of the opera, and possesses corresponding functional and characteristic traits. But if such a piece is performed as an independent instrumental work, then these traits recede into the background, if they do not disappear altogether."¹⁸ In light of our discussion, this last statement needs a gentle correction: it is not the functional and characteristic traits themselves that recede or disappear,

18. Walter Wiora, "Zwischen absoluter und Programmusik," in *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Anna Amalie Abert and Wilhelm Pfannkuch (Kassel, 1963), p. 383.

TABLE II.
Key Scheme of Vitellia's Final
Recitative and Rondo in *La clemenza di Tito*

	Recitative	Rondo (trans.)	Chorus
Flats: -2	D		D
-1	G		G G
0	a		C
1	F-d	F	
2	B ^b	B ^b	
3	c	c-E ^b	
4	A ^b	f	
5		b ^b	

but their correspondence with analogous traits in the opera itself. The meanings that arise in experiencing this overture, or any piece of music, do not inhere in the notes themselves, but depend on the context in which we apprehend them.

For an overture, of course, that context is the way it relates to the opera being introduced. The initial plot of *The Magic Flute*, one of the most popular of its day, is the romance of quest and rescue. This plot, however, is supplanted by another, higher one. In the act 1 finale, Tamino swerves from the knightly mission so familiar to audiences at Schikaneder's Theater auf der Wieden and embraces a different quest: the topos of trials and initiation replaces the topos of crusade and rescue. In the process, the inherent inequality and stereotyping of the sexes that the rescue topos perpetuates are superseded by a new order.

The overture too begins with one apparent plot and turns to another. The slow introduction and fugal exposition speak of an old order of harmonic and thematic organization and discourse; but that order yields to sonata form with its higher modes of organization. They are higher, I think, because they do not banish those of the old order but subsume and redirect their energies. It bespeaks a higher mode as well that overt musical correspondences with the opera itself are all but absent from the overture; in that way, its musical discourse adumbrates the spirit of the work less directly but more fully: it speaks in parables. Prior to the lifting of the curtain we in the opera house, like Tamino at the start of act 2, stand at the North Gate of the kingdom, and the overture begins our musical initiation into the mysteries of the opera that follows.